

Calendar

Divided We Fail

Join AARP Washington for a series of free Divided We Fail community programs. All events are 9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

May 7, Spokane

May 21, Bellevue

June 4, Kennewick

July 9, Vancouver

Preregistration is required. Visit www.aarp.org/wa or call 1-877-926-8300 to register.

AARP sponsored "Hoopla 2008"

June 16, Seattle Storm at Key Arena

Discounted game tickets available for AARP members. Visit www.aarp.org/wa for details.

Volunteer

Match your interests

The Retired Senior and Volunteer Program offers flexibility and choice for volunteers 55 and older. Visit www.seniorcorps.org.

Recognize a volunteer leader

AARP is accepting nominations for the 2008 AARP Andrus Award for Community Service, the Association's most prestigious volunteer award. Nominations are due by June 2. For more, visit www.aarp.org/volunteer.

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Make sure your voice is heard.

Insured Suffer in the Health Care Crisis, Too

Lack of insurance isn't the only reason to feel squeezed by the system. Not all the insured can make ends meet.

A RECENT REPORT from Families USA, a consumer health organization, highlights a growing predicament among families with health insurance — barely affordable health care costs even with coverage. One in four insured people reports trouble paying medical bills or medical debt.

Over 380,000 Washingtonians under the age of 65, most of whom are insured, are in families that will spend more than 25 percent of their pre-tax income on health care in 2008, and more than 1.3 million are in families that will spend more than 10 percent. Rising health care costs

that consume an ever-growing portion of income include growing costs of premiums as employers pay less, mounting co-pays and deductibles, uncovered prescription costs and a myriad of other expenses.

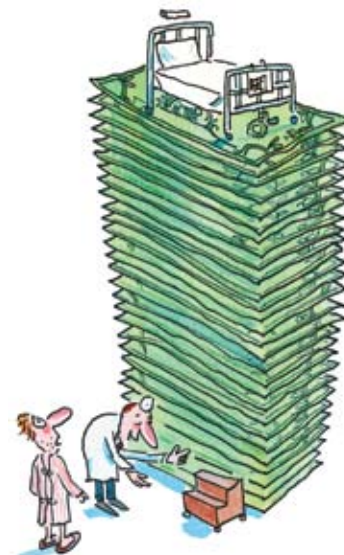
Medicare beneficiaries are also feeling the pain, as Part B premiums have more than doubled since 2000. For some, high health care costs are affecting decisions about when to retire.

The Families USA report, the first of its kind to calculate these costs on a state-specific basis, found that between 2000 and 2008, an additional 132,000

Washingtonians joined those spending 25 percent of family income on health care.

To help turn things around, AARP is holding a series of free Divided We Fail events. (See calendar on this page for dates.) The events, part of the nationwide initiative, are designed to raise the voices of millions of Americans who believe that health care and financial security are the most pressing domestic issues facing our nation.

Visit www.aarp.org/wa for more information or to register.



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Guard It! Washington

In Washington, approximately 5,000 consumers are victimized by identity theft every year. To combat the growing problem of identity theft, AARP Washington is joining the State Office of the Attorney General and Federal Trade Commission to launch "Guard it! Washington," a statewide campaign to educate consumers and businesses on how to spot and stop identity theft.

Free consumer information events will be held across the state starting this spring. Upcoming dates and cities include:

- ❑ May 12 — Bellingham
- ❑ July 2 — Aberdeen
- ❑ Aug. 14 — Moses Lake
- ❑ Sept. 3 — Centralia

The sessions will feature Attorney General Rob McKenna and issue experts from AARP, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division.

Free paper shredding will be offered at many locations. People can bring up to three grocery bags or two file boxes of material to shred.

Additional events are likely and details are subject to change. For more information or to register for a Guard It! event, go to www.guarditwashington.com or call toll free 1-800-646-2283.

Insurance Rate Accountability bill, giving the insurance commissioner greater power to regulate the individual insurance market.

Buying individual health coverage is a daunting task, especially for older people. Without a group plan, a healthy 62-year old can expect to pay \$500 – \$1,000 a month in premiums, plus thousands more on deductibles, co-pays and uncovered services. In 2006, 45,184 Washington residents between the ages of 55 and 65 were uninsured.

Last year Regence BlueShield imposed massive rate increases averaging 19.4 percent on individual plans. Regence leveled the largest rate hikes against those who were older and most in need of care. Some people saw their rates jump as much as 40 percent.

The Insurance Rate Accountability bill establishes greater public oversight over such rate increases. The new law will limit the ability of insurance companies to raise individual rates without approval of the insurance commissioner and will improve standards for the proportion of premiums that must be spent on health care rather than administrative overhead. "Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia already have this kind of consumer protection in place," said AARP State Director Doug Shadel. "Now Washingtonians will also have the peace of mind of knowing that someone is looking out for their best interests."

People



John Barnett is AARP's new volunteer Washington state president. Barnett will direct the organization's activities

on behalf of more than 930,000 Washington members. "I plan to continue our efforts around consumer protection, health care and long-term care issues, and the fight to lower prescription drug costs," Barnett said. "These issues not only affect today's older adults, but also their families and friends for generations to come."

Lillian Hayashi and Pauline Lothspeich have joined the AARP Washington Volunteer Executive Council.

Hayashi has volunteered and worked for a number of community service organizations including Nikkei Concerns, Alzheimer's Association, RSVP, Washington Association of Housing and Services for the Aging and the Japanese Community Cultural Center. Lothspeich is a former educator from eastern Washington, and a long-time community advocate for organizations including the Washington State School Retirees Association, YWCA, the League of Woman Voters and the Washington State Historical Society.



In February **Helene and Dom Bonura** held the state's largest AARP Driver Safety Program

(DSP) course designed specifically for deaf participants. The two have taught similar courses for the last nine years in eight other states. Helene was the first instructor certified as a DSP trainer for the deaf; with the program's success, several other instructors have now been certified. For more information, visit www.aarp.org/driversafety.

IN THE COURTS

Users Have No Money to Burn on High Rates

AARP has filed a brief supporting Snohomish County Public Utility District (PUD) in its U.S. Supreme Court dispute with Morgan Stanley Capital Group.

The case centers on the 2000 – 2001 Western energy crisis, when electricity rates soared in Washington, California and Nevada due to market manipulations. Washington consumers faced a 35 percent increase in electricity rates, some California consumers saw their electric bills triple and Nevada consumers experienced rate increases of approximately 50 percent over five years.

"The Commission's failure to address the unfair contracts in this case has seriously hurt consumers, many of whom are on fixed incomes and can barely pay their utility bills," said AARP Foundation Attorney Barbara Jones.



AARP is arguing in support of consumers in the fight for reasonable electric rates.

YOUR HEALTH AND SAFETY

Electronic Records Aim to Increase Safety

Ever had trouble remembering the conversations, diagnosis and treatment information you and your doctor exchange? Help could be on the way.

The Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA) is working on developing and testing personal digital health records focused on patients. When the pilot test occurs in early 2009, patients will be able to maintain, edit, update and share some or all of the medical information in their personal record with physicians and other audiences of their choice.

The HCA is seeking Washington state citizens interested in providing input. To learn more, or to participate in surveys and focus groups this spring and summer, e-mail hcahitmr@hca.wa.gov. Put "AARP Member" in the subject line.

FROM THE STATEHOUSE

Members Rally for Fair Insurance Rates

AARP members mobilized in force to demand that government be a stronger watchdog over insurance companies and ensure that their rates are fair. As a result, the Legislature passed the

The Washington State Senior Games men's champion in 25-yard backstroke event, age 55 – 59, swam the heat in under 16 seconds.

To find some of the state's great travel destinations, from mountains to seashore, go to www.experiencewa.com.



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Shelby Gilje

Lillian Hayashi

Tom Hokanson

Bill Iulo

Pauline Lothspeich

Ed Singler

13th

**Rank of Washington
 nationally in reports of
 identity theft. Down from
 9th last year.**

Q&A

Keeping Health Insurance in Check

AARP spoke with Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler about health insurance access and costs and a recent voter-approved measure to protect Washington consumers.



Q. *The health care system is in crisis. More than 775,000 Washingtonians were uninsured in 2006, and one in four people with insurance doesn't have enough coverage. How can we help ensure access to affordable, quality care?*

A. I propose giving all Washingtonians — whether they currently have insurance or not — as a right of residency, a guaranteed level of financial security in the event of a personal health crisis. For non-Medicare enrollees, my proposal would guarantee coverage for all medical expenses in excess of \$10,000 a year, plus

provide key preventive care — immunizations, cancer screenings, an annual check-up and one dental visit each year. The end result is more affordable, comprehensive coverage and a private insurance market that competes on quality and service, instead of avoiding older and sicker people. For those of us getting closer to retirement age, my proposal guarantees peace of mind in the event of a personal health crisis.

Q. *Health insurance premiums for Washingtonians are skyrocketing. We keep paying more but getting less. What is the Office of the Insurance Commissioner doing to help?*

A. The 2008 Legislature recognized this growing problem and passed my requested bill to restore my office's authority to regulate the individual health insurance market. This authority, by itself, isn't a silver bullet to stop escalating health insurance premiums for individuals, but it will ensure that the rates the companies charge are merited. In a few short months, health insurers will have to demonstrate to me that the rates they wish to charge indi-

viduals for health insurance are justified or I won't allow them.

Q. *In November 2007, Washington voters passed Referendum 67 allowing policyholders to collect triple damages and legal costs if their insurer unreasonably denies a claim or violates unfair practice rules. How will the new measure affect the insurance marketplace and how will it help protect Washington consumers?*

A. My position has always been that insurers who treat their policyholders fairly and reasonably needn't fear any negative consequences from the Fair Insurance Conduct Act. The voters of Washington, however, decided that they wanted more than assurances. Last year's passage of Referendum 67 provides strong consumer protection for policyholders who have had their claims unreasonably denied or been otherwise treated unfairly.

If you have questions, or need help with disputed claims and other insurance matters, contact the Insurance Consumer Hotline at 1-800-562-6900 or www.insurance.wa.gov.

FROM YOUR ADVOCACY DIRECTOR

Flying Right on Fixing Health Care



"Reforming our health care system is like rebuilding an airplane while it's in flight. It's incredibly tough to do — some say impossible. But we have to try."

These are the words of two of our states' most influential health care reformers, chairs of the state Senate and House Health Care Committees, Sen. Karen Keiser (D-Dist. 33) and Rep. Eileen Cody (D-Dist. 34).

This past session they championed legislation to help our state move toward quality, affordable coverage for all Washington residents by 2012, the goal set by the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Health Care.

In 2008, the Legislature will contract with experts to analyze five health care reform proposals, ranging from a free market to a single-payer system. In 2009, the governor will appoint a workgroup, with nine citizens and two legislators from each party, to review the studies, lead a broad public engagement process and recommend a reform plan to the 2010 legislative body.

At AARP, we have a lot of work to do to keep this airplane in flight. Join us in the effort by attending one of our Divided We Fail events this spring (more on page 1).

"We have a lot of work to do to keep this airplane in flight."

Ingrid McDonald works at both the state and national levels for the rights and interests of AARP's Washington state members.

Since 1990, the prevalence of obesity in Washington state has increased from 9.4 to 24.2 percent of the population.

To learn about nutrition and physical activity, visit the Washington State Department of Health at www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/NutritionPa.

Resources

To call/visit online:

AARP Tax-Aide
www.aarp.org/taxaide

Aging and Disability Services Administration
1-800-422-3263
www.aasa.dshs.wa.gov

Attorney General's Office
1-800-551-4636
www.atg.wa.gov

Benefits QuickLINK
www.aarp.org/quicklink

Eldercare Locator
1-800-677-1116
www.eldercare.gov

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program
www.liheapwa.org

Social Security Administration
1-800-772-1213
www.socialsecurity.gov

Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA)
1-800-562-6900
www.insurance.wa.gov

To read:
To receive the following free AARP publications, call 1-866-227-7457.

Medicines Made Easy

Money Matters – Your Guide to Financial Security

To order:
To receive the following free materials, call the AARP Fraud Fighter Call Center toll free at 1-800-646-2283.

Invest Wise Washington – Tips to Help You Avoid Investment Scams

Tip-offs to Rip-offs – How to Recognize If Someone You Know Is in Danger of Being Scammed

DIVIDED WE FAIL

For Most, Retirement Looks Uncertain

WORRYING ABOUT THE FUTURE? You've got company. Only 27 percent of people age 40 and older are confident that they will have enough money to live comfortably throughout retirement.

Social Security remains our most reliable source of retirement income. But those benefits alone cannot provide financial security, and other sources of retirement income have deteriorated.

Traditional pension plans are down sharply – only one in five American workers looks forward to a retirement check from the workplace. Some workers are offered a 401(k) or similar voluntary plan. But half of all private-sector employees either don't have that option or aren't using it.

Personal savings are headed the same way. More than half of workers who have saved for retirement have put away less than \$25,000. People simply don't have money to save.

The Washington Voluntary Retirement Accounts program (WVRA) might help. This new program, under development by the Washington State Department of Retirement Systems, will



make voluntary, portable retirement savings accounts available to all workers in the state. Payroll deductions and optional employer contributions will provide an easy way for individuals to save for retirement and help small businesses – who often lack the resources to provide their own retirement plan – make a retirement plan available to their workers.

Join the Divided We Fail Initiative!

I want to join with millions of other Americans to support candidates who will give us action and answers on health and lifetime financial security. We need to elect leaders who will end the gridlock in Washington, D.C., and get things done.

I pledge to:

- ☐ Vote for candidates who will ensure that all Americans have access to affordable, quality health care.
- ☐ Vote for candidates who will ensure that all Americans have peace of mind about their lifetime financial security.
- ☐ Vote for candidates who are specific about what they'll do and how, and who stop speaking in generalities.

I'm using my vote to deliver the message that the time to address these problems is now. Candidates owe us action and an-

swers, and they must commit to delivering long-term, lasting solutions if elected.

Signature

Name

Address

City, State, Zip

E-mail

☐ Please keep in touch with me by e-mail about AARP activities, events, and member benefits.

Please mail your signed pledge to
AARP Washington, 9750 3rd Ave. NE
Suite 450, Seattle, WA 98115

AARP is nonpartisan and does not own a political action committee (PAC), endorse political candidates, or contribute money to political parties or political candidates campaigns. AARP educates the public about issues of concern to older Americans and their families through voter guides, issue workshops, and candidate forums.

Divided  WeFail.org

 **Ambassadors Group – a Spokane educational-travel provider – is one of the nation's top 30 small companies, says Forbes.**

 **AARP members and friends can save 50 percent on the AARP Driver Safety Program in May – visit www.aarp.org/driversafety.**